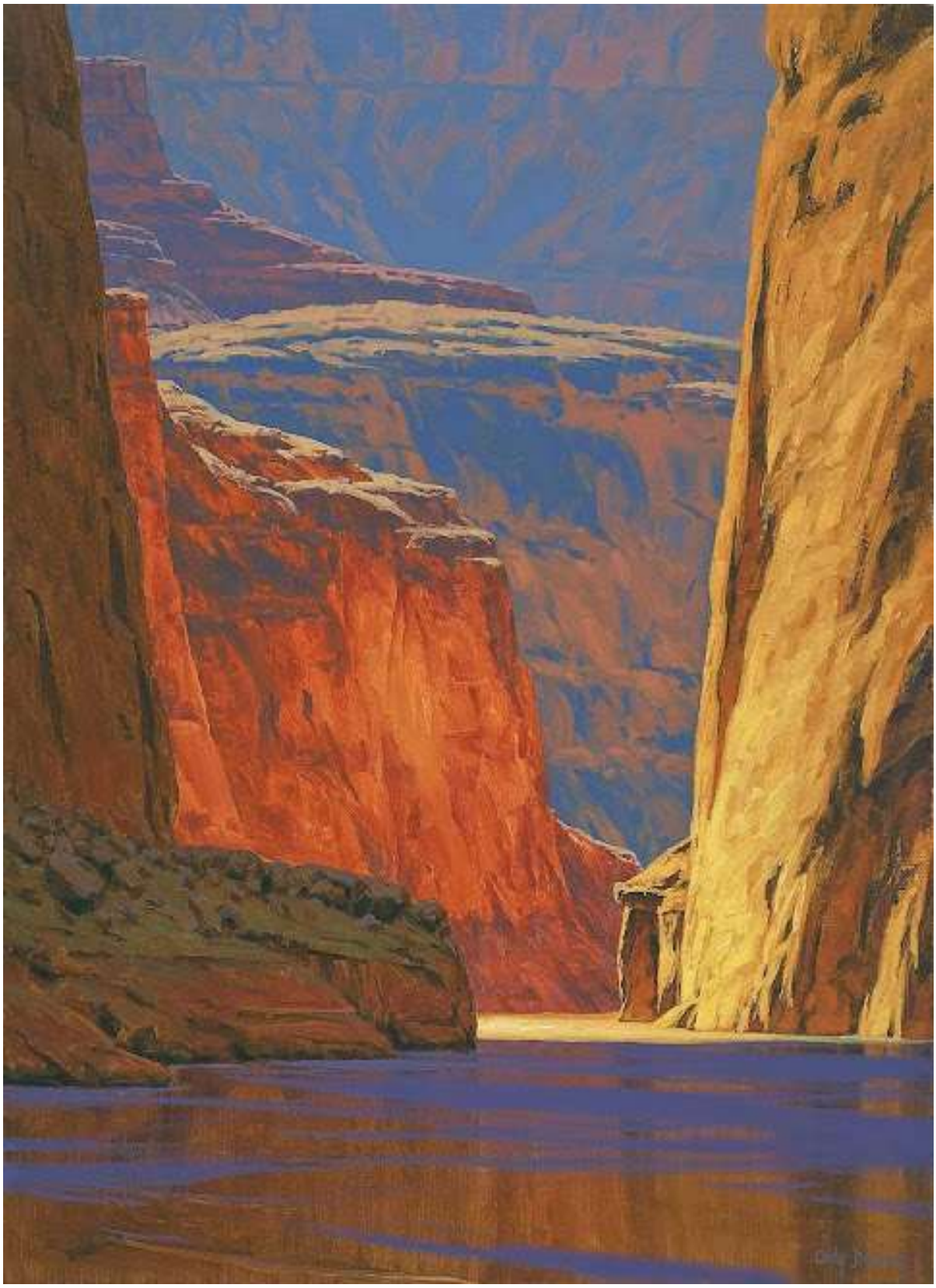

Canyons Lined in Blue Waters

Adam Fieled

Cover image by Cody DeLong
Deep in the Canyon, 2008
©Adam Fieled 2013-2025

I. Wolf's Hour:
Carnal Apparition Poems

#555

Wood-floored bar on Rue St. Catharine—
you danced, I sat, soused as Herod,
sipped vodka tonic, endless bland
medley belting out of the jukebox—
you smiling, I occupied keeping you happy,
un-frazzled— suddenly sounds behind us,
the bar wasn't crowded & a patron
(rakish, whisker-flecked big mouth)
lifted a forefinger at beer-bellied
bartender bitching back, soon a real
fight, violence in quiet midnight,
I, scared, got you out of there

but you had to dance, you said,
had to dance so we paved Plateau, tense steps,
found nothing, you started crying & stamping
your feet like a child, I grabbed you & dragged
you back to our room you stripped, curled
into fetal position, beat your fists against
the mattress, in this way you danced
through the night, dozed & woke ready for more—

#1473

Passages that shudder between
blackness between legs between
what moves (taps head) between
us like this (taps head again) hints
she may not be the animal bride I'm
looking for (by this I mean seed carrier,
not the same as mother-for-kids, almost),
what's between what used to be between

us, what now is, is between her, others who
have more claim to be animal brides, but she's
here, that's the key, here now, actually, which may
be all that matters, if to matter is to lie back, legs
apart, between being, becoming, moving, removing
all barriers, fences, boundaries, expenses to move again.

#1328

The girl on the trolley
had pitch black hair,
eyes to match, I got
her vibes instantly—
        so, what do we
        want to do? Do
        we want to do
        this? Is it OK?
took her back here
took her clothes off
took her not gently
        I'll never take the 34 again—

#1327

She said, you want Sister
Lovers, you son of a bitch,
pouted on a beige couch in
Plastic City, I said, I want
Sister Lovers, but I'm not
a son of a bitch, and I can
prove it (I drooled slightly),
took it out and we made
such spectacular love that
the couch turned blue from
our intensity, but I had to
wear a mask because I'd
been warned that this girl
was, herself, a son of a bitch—

#1546

What a tussle it was, I
could only see her eyes,
tiny bits of red above,
stark, blank blueness, I
felt animal fear between
us, but a poltergeist was
pushing our bodies into
one another, dead flesh
inhabited by spirits, for
the time nothing came
from our mouths, dead
liveliness, deep into the
wolf's hour this went on—
our eyes couldn't close.

#512

as if I would strike you,
as if I, myself, were pushing
your face away, fists livid
against yr soft, wasp-y cheeks.
in some other world my parts
bear nectar, my hands clasp
your own like wonted shelter.
in some other dream your
eyes don't freeze but melt,
sugar cubes smashed by light.

#1557

Since you are a scorpion
that stings herself to death,
after so many stings, redness
never leaves my joints, I feel
zilch. I call this *your* passionate
time, as I have no intent of
tempting the scorpion again.
I've seen nests for you all over
Philly, from Front Street right
up to Baltimore, and you know
what? You might finally get the
death you want. A sultry night,
desert all around, legs akimbo.

#1529

I'm having a better time now,
I told her, its unfortunate that
you were happier fifteen years
ago, but you certainly had your
chance, those days we sat next
each other different places, and
of course your best friend the
idiot, Queen of Sheba, now here
you are back hot to fool around,
suddenly I call the shots, I'm a
real hot-shot, there's a shot we
might actually shoot each other,
because violence is what you want—
she unzipped her dress, frowning.

#1121

How I wanted her!
Everything pointed
me into her—
gossamer silk
over her belly
black panties
head turned
towards me—
I nailed her to my wall,
I nailed her—

she never forgave me

#1065

Black-shirted,
bright eyes in
dream-blues,
parents dead
of a car crash,
I kissed her so
long I felt as if
I would crash,
South Street
loud around
us, lips soft—

#1313

we can't stop trying to conceive,
even though our bodies are dead
to each other, and nightly deaths
I took for granted are razors in a
        part of my flesh that
        can never live again—
certain possessions possess us.

#1316

Hunters get smitten with their prey,
but to kill is such an amazing rush
who could possibly resist, I'm into
these thoughts because you dazzle
me away from words into your red
pulpy depths, which I resent, but I
can do nothing about, because you
have nails in your cunt and crucifix
in your mouth, when I come I'm a
perfect personal Jesus, but the gash
is all yours, did I mention I love you?

#1342

What's in what eyes?
What I see in hers is
mixed greenish silence,
somewhat garish, it's
past girlish (not much),
but I can't touch her
flesh (set to self-destruct),
anymore than she can
understand the book
her cunt is, that no one
reads directly, or speaks
of, there's no love other
than "could be," but I
think of her throat cut—
that's her slice of smut.

#1497

nothingness grows vast,
nothingness tastes sweet
only for ten seconds— of

this, depth without depth,
crass substitute for realms
of total glory she effaces

(once spilled milk cries)
like a chalk-stain on blue
jeans, a just-smoked joint.

#1070

I said, “I can’t
even remember
the last time I
was excited, how
can I associate
ideas?”
She pulled
out a gun, a tube
of oil, and an air
cushion,
and it was
a spontaneous
overflow,
powerfully
felt, in which we
reaped together—

Credits

The Argotist (UK)— 1327, 1328

denver syntax— 1473, 1497

Great Works (UK)— 1065, 1070

moria— 1529

P.F.S. Post— 535

Scud— 1342

All included poems were also included in the book *Apparition Poems*.

II. Terse as this is: Meta-Poetry

#1335

terse as this is, it is
given to us in bits
carelessly shorn
from rocky slopes,
of this I can only
say nothing comes
with things built in,
it's always sharp edges,
crevices, crags, precipice,
abrupt plunges into "wants,"
what subsists between us
happens in canyons lined
in blue waters where this
slides down to a dense
bottom, I can't retrieve
you twice in the same
way, it must be terse
because real is terse,
tense because it's so
frail, pine cones held
in a child's hand, snapped.

#220

Poetry from a pure place
is an impossibility: as you
write, even the slants you
tell fall within the purview
of the filthy. So did Emily,
alone in a drafty house in
snow-capped Amherst, as
a dream presented itself to
her of Gods in America. As
those Gods became common,
hovering in or past receptive
heads, the filth was in not just
her words but her life. Solitary
filth— that's all of us, but the
visionary deadness and the
beautiful scum make pretty
pictures against grains, strains.

#1117

Sometimes you write
from ocean's bottom,
blue waters bury you,

an octopus comes to
give you ink, tentacle
words, fortitude for

battles to get back on
the surface, where you
must fight to get past

jellyfish blocks, tears—

#1083

Is art slightly less
stupid than every-
thing else?
        I am more
        moved by
        flesh, and
        stupidly,
how easily
some skin
peels off
        layers of text—
"company of blood,"
Lucy on a bed
        with diamonds—

#1134

It is by dint of great labor
that lines heap up on one
another (enjambed or not),

it is by dint of great labor
that they take on the cast,
die, substance that sticks,

it is by dint of great labor
that poets must forget this,
because to stick means not

to stick, it means to loosen
perpetually out of grooves,
let things topple into place,

let shapes manifest slowly,
let life meander, be rolling—

#1145

The Tower of Verse
is a Babel, no one pays
their rent, many leap
from windows to sure
death, many leave, yet
there is a strange sense
of satisfaction given to
those who stay, and it
is merely this—
clean windows
allow us to see
wisps of smoke,
(grey, red, turbid)
rise from ashes—

#1343

This process of leaping
happens between lines,
like a fish that baits its
own hooks; heights in
depth, depths of height,
all colliding in a mesh of
net cast only for a fish to
bring it down on itself, so
that others swim out past—
I don't mean myself in this.

#221

Torque: you can start a mile past
personal emotions, but you must
jog back and touch emotion's very
green blarney stone every few lines
to fulfill responsibilities no one else
wants to engage. Slats of blinds get
shut to keep sun out of your eyes,
even as the torque expresses both
elisions, ellipses, eerie as they form
a blockade of angles to knock you
down. It's the warp of centuries: "I"
set loose to torque combinations of
data in every way creepy to desires
for raw earth permanence, mountainous
forms. They attract mist, kisses, and the
accursed share of angst that dawdles in
flesh like a child with a blanket.

#1209

Poems with "I" and "she"
are older than the galaxy,
have power to rivet me,
because there is no "I"
for me without a "she,"
even if I feminize this
highly vaginal computer
screen, my seminal hands—

#1571

To cut right to the bone—
there is no bone in this,
it's mirrors, echoes, bits,
more than play, less than

life, but anything limiting
this needs to be chucked
like fruit rinds into a bin,
any arbitrary signifier that

knows itself to be arbitrary
can *work* as mirrors, echoes,
bits, if you have faith that
what's ineffable counts, is.

#1549

Think of these in terms
of vertical movements—
what goes up or doesn't.

Does this go up? It may,
if it creates something I
feel is not "in the world"

yet, but it must also have
solid roots in the world
to be something else, it

must acknowledge what
can be called horizontal.
The best poems are zig-

zags, lightning bolts, that
go from side to side, up
at the same time. This is

a meta-bolt, but whether
it "goes" is up to you alone.

#1533

So much gets involved with
this that isn't this, that what
this is gets lost, whatever it
is, which no one knows, but
that "I" is in it somewhere
(no one knows where), there
must be a "you" (if it's art,
as it may or may not be), so
two bases are covered, like
two breasts of a mother
weaning her young, and
whether or not we are made
young by this is another good
question: we may be, maybe.

#1563

If poetry makes nothing happen,
there is no "great political poetry
tradition," so I yawp no "O any-
thing" to anyone who is not my
captain, and whose position is not
in any way tenable; no one (that I
know) has any excuses, we forge
ahead regardless, Nero's fiddle is
sounding in the distance, personal
habits of Romans have entered our
lives, but I have this time to write
this and if you like it, is it enough?

#1524

Poems: do this every day, it
becomes like roulette without
being (or seeming) Russian; if
you go here what happens, if
you move your knight onto a
new square can you take all the
pawns (at once, even, why not
be ambitious?), not everyone is
simpatico, the knights often say
they're kings, the board is clay.

#1601

What words get sent up
on sharp frequencies are
fractious, bent from pain,
Hephaestus in iron-groans,
what goes up sticks around,
so that base/top get covered,

all things resonate like pitch-
forks, tweaked by conductors
before their final, triumphant
performance for a hall empty
of bodies, filled to capacity.

#547

Spirit melts, leaving
butter particles strewn
along leaf-veined avenues—
how absurd, that it should
be in poetry, hiding there
like a cat in a dry bath-tub,
like water in a drain, like
so much dark moon.

#545

Words are spirits,
words wording
through us like
savored pulp.
Words, strained
or comatose,
plucking laurel
for some lucky
fuck. Substantive
spirit words, cored &
pitted, wait to be bit
like knowledge of
good & evil, stems.
Not a cask or a flask—
some vessel from
nether regions of
Venus. Easy to be
dispirited, cored,
yet stem systems are
permanent. Say them.

#577

You can only transcribe by dying,
the things you transcribe are dying,

the way you transcribe is dying
by the time you transcribe,

so if you must transcribe,
you must die, or die trying

#1602

I stepped like a mantis off this ship
of fools, felt around for prey, found
a plate of ants to put in a microwave,
I saw how they scurried briefly, put it
into text that had the heat of ovens in
it, shipped this text across vast oceans,
it preyed on suspicions, was placed on
plates, now that I have prayed, I am (or
may be) redeemed, but every step I take
feels like a scurry, as the fools are more
numerous than I thought, just like ants.

#2042

If you attempt to
create something
solid from language,
all the million
harrows of your
inadequacy must
pursue you, what's
hollow is harrowing—
past your control.

As for "I," you'd
better sacrifice
the whole construct,
complexities & all,
as it is all evanescent,
& circuits back to
language show you
all the magic
prophecies of non-
existence you not
only fulfill, but embody—

#1913

You watch, as in slow motion glass-
hewn objects crash to the ground, as
streams back and forth confirm, once
again, you've cracked into a slug-pile
of heartless psychopaths—I stand
aside, jaundiced, wearing my own
glasses, knowing blown glass to be
how human interstices are knit, words
to be an absolute sky of glass, and here
I am, speaking to you in transparencies—

Credits

Blazevox 11— 547

Cricket Online Review— 1571

denver syntax— 1343

diode— 220, 221

fourWtwentyone (anthology)— 1209

moria— 1524

Otoliths— 1549

P.F.S. Post— 1602

Stoning the Devil— 1288, 1145

Tears in the Fence— 1043, 1084, 1913

Upstairs at Duroc— 1355

All of these poems are included in the Apparition Poems series.

III. Quiddities
(Philosophical Poetry)

#717

On why it has to be that writing
comfortable garbage is the inevitable
byproduct of living comfortably, with
each fresh hell I wonder why the hooks
towards artful utterance are set this
way, and why I must become such an oyster
just to confer into a leaking bucket,
insecurely hung from abraded cables,
a blue droplet not even of blood but
of nectar, or wine, or whiskey—

#1345

Two hedgerows with a little path
between— to walk in the path like
some do, as if no other viable route
exists, to make Gods of hedgerows
that make your life tiny, is a sin of
some significance in a world where
hedgerows can be approached from
any side— I said this to a man who
bore seeds to an open space, and he
nodded to someone else and whistled
an old waltz to himself in annoyance.

What Needs No Myth

after W.B. Yeats

The actuality of summer leaves wavering—
water gushing from springs— wind redolent
with sap— will never be enough to fill great
chasms of self-consciousness, emptiness of

death-fearing despair. If we could only learn
to watch waves of the sea— what needs no
myth never stops coming. No Sphinx waits in
the desert— nothing slouches towards Bethlehem—

no preternatural reality waits to replace what
never was. Ghosts predominate— slouch, blood-
dimmed tide built into them. Meanwhile, actual
falcons manifest the miracle of flight— harbingers

of the endless— winging the air, persevering.
It is a matter of mathematics, of where the numbers
end. Or space, our real home— inscrutably expansive,
unbelievable. There is no judgment in space.

Asteroids come out of the void— full-bodied, hurtling,
bent on something. Stars live and die, to no
appreciable avail comprehensible to us. There is
enough wonder in the Universe to befuddle

a thousand sages. Jesus on the cross is simple
by comparison. Each reductive model bends
the Collective Unconscious further towards
breakage. Sodden with suffering, the great

unassimilated incorrigibly search beneath
the stratosphere. Who understands that
breaking the circle is a precondition to well-
roundedness? Having achieved existence,

even Buddha sat by the bo tree a little
eternity, rounding myths into pebbles, pebbles
into myths—

#1613

Follow Abraham up the hill:
to the extent that the hill is
constituted already by kinds
of knives, to what extent can
a man go up a hill, shepherd
a son to be sacrificed, to be
worthy before an almighty
power that may or may not
have had conscious intentions

where hills, knives, sons were
concerned, but how, as I watch
this, can I not feel that Abraham,
by braving knives, does not need
the one he holds in his rapt hands?

#1617

Philosophy says that poets want to lose.
What are conditions of losing: to whom?
The conditions (to whom they concern, to

unrepresented phantoms, mostly) are colors,
which, to transcribe, require a solid core of
nebulous necromancy which philosophy calls

(for its own poetic reasons) "loss." I took this
from one strictly (which necessitated looseness
towards me) for himself, took several median

blended colors and painted a razor on the roof
of a red building. Then I fell off. But I lived.

#1622

Poor Schopenhauer's axioms:
all in the will is a fight to beat
other wills. I see him in his
meager room, his will bent
not to do much, save himself
the trouble of fighting these
ineluctable battles, but not
able to refrain from eating,
breathing, shitting, fucking,
all those simple acts that are
will-to-survival, but Arthur
casts himself into a future of
power, not knowing when it
arrived it was to be a crass joke,
ended with face in turtle soup.

#1625

The "I" that writes cannot be
(he told us, perched on a hill of
flowers which he crushed, but, of
course, incompletely, and not all of
them at once) strictly for-itself as it
has no substance: a student walked

up, pricked his forearm (the back side
of it) with a small razor, he cringed but
only briefly, leaning forward so that a
row of buttercups doused him yellow.
The "I" that writes has a relationship
that is very much for itself, but it has

a strictly independent existence, so that
what constitutes a human "I" has no
meaning for it. Now, you need to know
this: I was not the student with the razor,
but I supplied the razor to the student
that cut the professor's forearm, but you

will never know how I got it, or why.

#1547

this is
what
words
amount
to—
festivals
of ash,
collapsed
into urns,
held
up by
timid folk
for the
bold to
scatter.

#1614

Set him in place: the Creator of the Universe.
For whatever reason Abraham might experience
a sense of being called, let's say that Abraham
is correct. The call is there, or was made. Since
the Creator of the Universe is a God, not a man,
what the query would be, or consist of, does begin
from the grounds of perfect truthfulness, immaculate
sagacity, consummate insight. I no longer believe
the Creator would call for Isaac's death. In my not
consummate imagination, which also cannot believe

human sagacity may achieve perfection, it nonetheless seems
the Creator has another question for Abraham to answer.
The incision is: Abraham is asked to prove, demonstrate, that
Isaac is really his son. How is he really your son? The dream
of family, among the human race, as a veil of Maya, at least
sometimes, is clouded by shrouds placed on reality, fatty
degeneration of surface tissue, the ancient quality of souls
lost in people thrown around. The Creator— conscious,
unconscious, personal, impersonal— is not looking for
blood. Why would he? Dumb for the Creator to ask for.

What the Creator wants is simply the truth manned
beneath the surface, what's perfectly there. Does Abraham?

#1616

The God who would have Isaac killed, you
might discover, was a pimp God. The administered
test, to Abraham, was a pimp test. The conscious,
personal portion of this God, creating illusions
of singularity, was initiating and completing a pimp
task. This, also, you might discover. What is past
our comprehension is there, too. What looks like
a pimp to us— who knows? But that the imposition
on Abraham pimps out something to Abraham—
a goomba-like, or pimpish, dispensation— this, you
need to know, is how it occurs to us that primordial
powers ooze their way up, into human consciousness—

or might, that is. You need to know and not know.
At the end, you judge that what they call God
is fashioned from human brains. That part is
simple. Myths stick or don't stick. Myths become
Gods-in-themselves: conscious, unconscious,
personal, impersonal. Myths are pimped out, too—

#1645

The father's gaze (depending which gaze
you happen to be referring to) is panoptic.
It goes in without leaving traces. So if you
have several fathers that leave no traces, &

merely invisible gazes, there is or maybe a
sense in which you have no fathers. I saw
all this happening to me, along with every
thing else, many years ago, before I could

visualize the cell I was in, before I knew
how the walls stank of fresh paint, or saw
that I was getting smeared at any juncture.
But, as I saw this, my father who was my

father turned, spoke down to me in such
a way that I listened. I took what he said,
gazed at my cell, and watched the paint dry
deep into the night before I busted out to

watch the dawn break over the Delaware.

#2043

For God to be God
God has to be something else
the manifestation of a center point
of perfectly well-rounded goodness
incorrigibly manning the ambiguous
affirming all sides of every equation
responsive both personally, impersonally
conscious and unconscious

but then, being there and not somewhere else
the Ontological Argument falls flat
God's not God
for God to be God

#2044

What if, really and truly,
the God that made us
was beneath us? What if
we emerged from ooze,
call it primordial, that was
itself a matrix for an eternity
of half-made garbage, and one
millennium, the entire universe
just slipped out— an accident?
There we were, all of us, at 1.0,
those elite-brained imposing
spatial-temporal dimensions
on time, space. Pygmies, also,
pushed down towards tiny
existences, hating 1.0 very much,
as an enemy like taxes, always there—

#1476

Days follow days off cliffs—
do these things we do have
any resonance, do they rise
into the ether, or are they to
be ground down into pulp,
briefly making earth sodden,
then dissipated dust scattered
over plains too vast, blasted
with winds, rains, storms, to
be counted or harvested?

#1901

Conshohocken power lines in the rain—
edges of buildings cut through whitened
sky, as rising light topples privacy for
squat-dwellers on the Schuylkill— I see
power defining itself in lines, acrobatic,
space-consonant, but always working
within suburban, subaltern parameters—
eternity decoyed from a rusty beneath.

#1480

How horrendous, to realize there
are people in the world with no
soul, walking zeros, hollow spaces,
dead end interiors, permanently
frozen faculties, how horrendous
to watch how they borrow words
of others to sound profound, but
each echo reveals there's nothing
behind it but the kind of charred
silence that comes after a corpse
is burnt— how horrendous, how
it makes some of us cling to what
we feel, how we feel, that we feel,
and that everything we feel is so
precious, specifically (and only)
because it is felt, and stays felt.

#1281

You can take for granted
lots of God-awful garbage
in places deemed important
by fools; this goes for every
thing, including poetry. Why?
Because the world runs (has,
will always) on mediocrity, so
safe, so comforting, like a mug
of hot cocoa on a winter's night,
or a mediocre simile, people want
others to be mediocre, to be fools,
that's just the way things go, people
are nothing to write home about, or
(if you are writing to God) nothing to
write about at all, the world is no mystery,
all the mystery is in the night sky, looking up.

#1241

Why does no one tell the truth?
Because the truth is (more often
than not) absurd. No one wants
to look absurd, so no one tells
the truth, which creates even
more absurdity; worlds grow
into self-parody, systems grow
down into gutters, whole epochs
are wasted in perfidy; Cassandra
finally opens her mouth, no one
listens, they want her to star in
a porno, set her up with a stage-
name, she learns not to rant,
visions cloud her eyes, cunt—

#1346

The righteous man or woman, God or Goddess,
who bears seeds to open spaces, knows, regardless
of prejudice, this: a sin is no sin if it's all you have
in you. What's in us, the human race, is what's had,
what's real, what we are. There's no sense planting
against what's real. The idealist coughs, panting
after the oblivion of the fictitious. Our relevant particular
is L-shaped, compounded of one big perpendicular—
us, what's real, what we are. Endless tug of war.
They've got the numbers, we've got the swords—
it was all in a nod, third-party directed, to take
him in, question him, let someone else remake
his brains, while the L-shaped fiasco's replanted.
Happy to be real is happy to be pedantic.

#1351

Once you learn the L, what it implies—
a stalemated race— the sky, clouds inhering,
bodies of water, stately mountains, grass,
the entire nine yards of it, all bent
into form as something humiliatingly past
your comprehension— then the L again,
what the human brain could be if not
plagued by child-like conditions—

mountains, perhaps it's the mountains
which move you the most, as words wind
their way into place, because a mountain
is what you most want to make, something
immovable, permanent, durable, solid,
something on your side of things, against
the other, which receives your ricochet,
waits to chop you, your mountain down to size—

#1067

I want to last—
to be the last
of the last of
the last to be

taken by time,
but the thing
about time is
that it wants,

what it wants
is us, all of us
wane quickly
for all time's

ways, sans "I,"
what I wants—

#2051

Each day, I'm hollowed by
the Recession's vacuum, and either
create my life or perish— no sense
of safety or coherence from a storied
past. As I walk Conshohocken's
streets, I note the sky, just before
dawn, amusing itself in pastels—
ice on branches over tiny front/
back yards— all held self-sufficiently
in time's objective indifference,
which I now feel passionately about,
for and against, December's circuits—

Credits

Artrecess2— 1625

Eratio Postmodern Poetry— 717, "What Needs No Myth"

Great Works (UK)— 1067

Ink Pantry— 2051

Jacket Magazine— 1345, 1476, 1480

P.F.S. Post— 1613, 1645, 2044

Sawbuck Poetry— 1617

Stoning the Devil— 1168, 1241

Tears in the Fence— 1901

All poems in this collection, excepting "What Needs…," are drawn from *Apparition Poems*.

IV. Ghosts by the Ice Skating Rink: The Cheltenham Elegies

#261

Never one to cut corners about cutting
corners, you spun the Subaru into a rough
U-turn right in the middle of Old York Road
at midnight, scaring the shit out of this self-
declared "artist." The issue, as ever, was
nothing particular to celebrate. We could
only connect nothing with nothing in our
private suburban waste land. Here's where
the fun starts— I got out, motherfucker.
I made it. I say "I," and it works. But Old
York Road at midnight is still what it is.
I still have to live there the same way you do.

#412

Each thinks the other a lonesome reprobate.
That's what I guess when I see the picture.
It's Elkins Park Square on a cold spring night;
they're almost sitting on their hands. One
went up, as they say, one went down, but
you'll never hear a word of this in Cheltenham.
They can't gloat anymore, so they make an
art of obfuscation. That's why I seldom go
back. Elkins Park Square is scary at night.
There are ghosts by the ice skating rink.

#414

And out of this nexus, O sacred
scribe, came absolutely no one.
I don't know what you expected
to find here. This warm, safe,
comforting suburb has a smother
button by which souls are unraveled.
Who would know better than you?
Even if you're only in the back of
your mind asphyxiating. He looked
out the window— cars dashed by
on Limekiln Pike. What is it, he said,
are you dead or do you think you're Shakespeare?

#421

Huddled in the back of a red
Jetta, I thought we were in a
Springsteen song. But there are
no backstreets in Cheltenham.
It's only the strip-mall to house
and back circuit. Anyone could've
seen us. It wasn't a full consummation—
for want of a graceful phrase, we
were too smart to fuck. There was
no playing hero for me. Nor did I
force you to confess. What could you say?
Cheltenham was soft, and all too infested.

#415

There's something sweet and sickly
about teenagers fucking. Even laid
down by the jagged rocks that bordered
Tookany Creek. I think of them there,
and know he's getting wasted. What's
draining out of him is the will to live.
She always gets him off somehow. Then
they would walk over to the Little League
field and huddle in the dugout. He didn't
even wind up graduating from Cheltenham
on time. I can't get over thinking who he
could've been. Am I the only one?

#260

I was too stoned to find the bathroom.
The trees in the dude's backyard made
it look like Africa. You were my hook-up
to this new crowd. The same voice, as always,
cuts in to say you were fucked up even
then. You had a dooming Oedipal
complex. We were all wrapped tight,
even when we got high. I was the
only one getting any, so you both
mistrusted me. African trees & easy
camaraderie. A primitive pact sealed
between warring factions— my spears
(take this as you will) for your grass.

#216

You can force your pen into a cat's anus
for all I care, she told him. October sun-
light hit the grimy pavement as if directed
by Rocky Balboa himself. The Art Museum,
he thinks, is mostly crap but its still imposing—
what man has made of man, fodder for gift-
shops. His working life is a gift-shop too—
no one buys anything. If he did force his
pen into a cat's anus, they'd probably arrest
him for animal abuse. Maybe he'll pretend that
she's a cat. Ring the bell for round two, please.

#212

Picture this: thirty kids in a two-story house
in the Poconos. They're little bandits.
Their parents think they're somewhere
else. It's the popular crew: but half the
baseball stars are homosexuals, half the
cheerleaders want to be housewives,
and the football guys are putting on five
pounds a day. They have to carry little
Megan outside for some fresh air; she's
drunk, got ditched by a wide receiver.
She looks at the mountain stars, thinks
(her friend imagines) nothing thoughts
about nothing. Eighteen years later: one
of the homosexual baseball stars is now
at a mountain retreat in the Poconos. He
gets carried out by his lover to look at the
stars, drunk on Mimosas. Nothing gets
thought about nothing again. What do I
think? I'm writing a letter to Nietzsche. Ask him.

#160

Your skin hangs around you like an old lady's
loose gown. You used to live a dynamic double
life, with constituents coming out of your ass
from three schools. No one anywhere knew
quite who you were. Now, I hesitate to state
anything for the record these guys are recording.
The whole process creeps me out. I sat in the
back of the Subaru while they egged somebody's
house, or he took a handful of CDs from Tower
Records, placed them under his sweater or into his
boxers. What I tell them is the truth: there was
too much in you that you never even knew about.
You were a mystery to yourself. You were the kid
at the bowling alley trying to hook up with the twins,
or the obsessive devotee of another head-case.
Now, I'm a head-case who knows the same thing
is true about me, and if my skin is tautened it stings.

#448

I was talking to the thin air twenty years ago,
but I still say it: for all the constituents you had
coming out of your ass, poke a hole in you,
there's nothing there. Wall Park that night was
desolate as ever, the moon bothered to hover
bemusedly above, all the rest. Out on the four-square
field of grass which bluntly, flatly dominates
the stupid place, an act was performed that made
your life as completely a parody as slamming back
rancid milk. She seems to have forgotten you, I
thought. The drive-by guys were surprised, to
say the least, as was I, drunk on stolen beer. They were, too.

#420

I.
The Junior Prom deposited me (and fifteen
others) on the floor of her basement. I could
barely see daylight at the time, and at three in
the morning I began to prowl. I was too scared
to turn on any lights. She emerged like a mermaid
from seaweed. I needed comfort, she enjoyed my
need. We had gone out— she was bitter. The whole
dialogue happened in shadows. No one was hooking
up in the other room, either. You spiteful little princess.

II.
Whether off the bathroom counter
or the back of your hand, darling,
your unusual vehemence that
winter night, cob-webbed by
half-real figures, was animated by an
unfair advantage, which stooges threw
at you to keep you loopy as you
died piece-meal. All I had
was incomprehensible fury and a
broken heart— when I hit the floor
at four, you were getting ready
to play fire-starter, opened
the little snifter, curled your finger
twice in the right direction; darkness—

Addendum: #420

The craftier angle to hear them: hover
in the doorway, in total darkness, hands
held behind your back. She takes a stand
against him in the shadows, as her lover
flails, barefoot on carpeting: jabs, another—

these two miserable adolescents, tokens
of the dirge that was this tepid Philly 'burb,
clown choruses pining for images, curbed
words replaced with scripts, minds unbroken
finally meeting ends in winter rain, soaking,

drenched with venom against the Solid.
What to look for: register his life-force
energies against hers, for the first course
her rhetoric takes against him, her stolid
defiance, sharply defined, against knowledge

that she's veered over into eerie wilderness.
It's true, the abyss laughs around her, & him,
but she's slightly more bound up in it, thinned,
bruised beneath surfaces to embrace the abyss,
all he needs is a caress given really, a kiss—

he won't get it. What he'll get is the meaning
of the surface she's chosen: bone, dust, webs.
Yet they stand exalted as they taste the dregs—
someone's watching elsewhere, & scheming.
Transmutation must happen, past dreaming—

that spirit, against the animal, is real in them.
The doorway is hinged to show you two souls—
unvarnished, electric, whether riddled with holes
or not, & love of a kind is being made, & gems.
The craftiest angle is not you, if you will, but them—

#702

His heart ached within a drowsy, numbed trance.
Cameras panned to him pacing the black-top, even
blacker at 3 am, which opens out on the expanse
of Mill Road, down the hill, past the school. Night deepened,
he was lonely enough to cry, heartsick for being
the only one of a scabrous tribe gutsy enough to say the name
which even then had rent Cheltenham, riddled
with bullets like a dog's corpse, assassins fleeing
the site of the hit, where the one kid, bound for fame,
did for himself the trick of ditching a tepid middle.

He levitates past himself, flies with bugs into crevices,
is the pilot of the few airplanes wafting by, Pegasus-like
for a mind intent on flight, meeting divinity, heaven's bliss
from a cockpit. Myers' schoolyard glistens like spikes.
She knew him then, at her end— saw how the spine
imposed truth on empty gesture, feeling on pretense,
vital life on the living death of their shared enterprise.
This, he could never know; yet without knowing how, why,
he strode past her emptied house that night, tense,
sweating in summer's stew, pallid in cold surprise.

The apostate flies around a small room, piles of books,
papers scattered, forests of drafts, faintly heard bird-song.
Verdurous plains suggest themselves; moss-softened nooks;
just out of time, to a mind o'er spelled by word-song.
He can only fly as he reads, over & over, the lays
already fastened to moss & flower, secured above
shallow stream. His friend waits, in stealth.
The early morning ride he caught then, from love
given, wasn't her— she had gone the way
there is no coming back— yet he slept himself back to health.

#524

When he drives around Elkins Park in
the dead of night, he thinks, this is how
I like the human race— asleep. When three roads
fork at Myers, he goes down Mill Road.
By the time the car climbs Harrison Ave,
he has the thought that the sleeping human
race is the holy one. He pushes past the old
derelict high school on High School Rd, wonders
if its still haunted. It flashes on him: the day
he broke in, smack in the middle of the Nineties,
with buddies now long dead. He found a hammer,
stole it, never used it— it sat in his closet
until after graduation. He was smashed then, too.

#268

Satin blouses, trinkets (some kind of
jade pendant), & the big trinket between
her legs that nobody gets to play with.
Rare meat. She's been babied by her
parents since her birth (Rabbit year,
a juxtaposition more sad than ironic),
and suddenly I can teach her something?
And I thought of what she was telling
herself in response, and the words came
to me, "I'm doing this because I promised,
my Mom wants me to do this, now I promised, I have to do this."

#427

When she starts at Rizzo's, winds her way around
to Easton Road on Saturday night, it's with full
control, absolute mastery— here's where Glenside
stands, where it's going, here's why. The game
continues over to Limekiln Pike— Wawa, Tail
of the Whale. Not just the surface, but who's
hiding where, with what, & again why. Yet deep
in her heart, the ultimate why, life or death in
a sense of purpose, remains barren. The spider
in the glass case, frozen in the Humphrey's
Pest Control window, is to the point— Humphrey's
never answers anyway— the spider tells her
where the real action is. Then the beauty of it—
her sacrifice to/for Glenside— becomes just another
heist in the world. Limekiln Pike is too steep to climb.

#529

Knives thrust into wooden tables at the drop
of a name— factions squaring off, bedraggling
an endless summer— here they sat at the Glenside
Pub, securely fastened to life or otherwise, glared
down the throats of their enemies, into their lagers.
Nick, C.J. and the rest were telling stories. It was
Jeremy, they said, who was covered in leeches, like
me. I had hijacked his potency, mojo, what have you.
Stop midflight, adjust the altitude, right? Spreadsheets
held their own knives. Step back, Jack. C.J. towers
(he thinks), Nick dazzles (he thinks), puddings'
right there, chumps. The blonde (his) leers.
Easton Road chokes all over again. He steers.

Knives thrust into wooden tables gave Nick
a misty-eyed look— as was later learned, he was
stealing again. Too many secret alliances, too
many mystifications, Nick that summer was
securely fastened to nothing. He was the kind
of guy who liked to think of nothing as something
solid, himself the master of a solid kind of nothing,
manifested by him, whatever spreadsheet was up.
A dead duck's a dead duck, dazzling or not. He'll
never mistake himself for flesh & blood (invert),
never protect himself falsely (invert), never ask
how he got to the places he may arrive at. I thought
I knew then where he was. But he got caught.

#548

I.
Beheaded? A contestant on Wheel of Fortune, to see
how much of his soul he can singe in one night: beheaded?
All because I wouldn't save him. Not that it was my
responsibility to do so (car turns onto Harrison Avenue,
parks). The encampment area at the corner of Harrison
& Limekiln shows off, at this time of night, the monstrosity,
Glenside Elementary, as an act of architectural vandalism;
my miserable wife won't talk to me, at first blood she
starts to wheeze, I (the king) can't help her either, because
I (the king) am a peon here. It flew off with the first
birds of dawn, and with Nick's blood-soaked head on
a pike: my soul. Now, for eighteen months, it's gone.

II.
Halfway over the Atlantic Ocean, there it was, affixed to
the cockpit's glass to deliver a Lenny Bruce-ian monologue:
Nick's severed head. How nice of you to show up, Nick,
but I have a responsibility here, these people's lives are all
depending on me, so… *the nose knows. What the nose knows,
the nose knows, but what you don't know the nose knows, is how
you smell to me, and your past smells like ass, for real.* He knows,
he's not only not supposed to sweat, he's supposed to
manifest nothing but the most masterful ten-hour coolness.
He does, but only through years of rigorous practice. His
insides are not as numb as they were when the whole
sword-blade heist happened; everything in him stews.
Glenside Elementary re-delivers to him its terrible news.

#413

All piled into the house on Woodlawn.
They had me do all the old jokes, as though
I were a wind-up toy. Most of them had
never been in the house before. It was
about to be abandoned anyway; but my
mind still clings to it. I smoked pot there
for the first time. I got on the road to my
first hook-up at a party, & I punched a
Hulk Hogan poster's crotch. Now even
this pile-up was fifteen years ago. The shed
in the back was filled with smoke, as were we—

& no one who was there that night, high,
hasn't been abased. Wisdom has its
palaces that look more like park benches.
Youth's privilege is to be in love with
life. I was in love with life that night, too—
the crush of strange kids in an Abington
house, movements towards more weed.
We sat on a curb and planned more
mischief. The Universe had some mischief
planned for us, too. For those of us who
live on the curb and nowhere else— a requiem.

Credits

Argotist Online Poetry— 702

As/Is— 413, Addendum 420

Boog City— 421, 415

Fieled's Miscellaneous— 268

Mad Hatter's Review— 414

Pressure Press— 418

Quarter After— 261, 412

The Seattle Star— 420, 524

All poems in this collection were drawn from the book *Cheltenham*.